



## Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

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### PRESS RELEASE

#### Regional stability in focus as OSCE Chairperson visits Tajikistan

DUSHANBE, 16 May 2011 – The OSCE is working intensively to support Tajikistan in strengthening the management and security of its border with Afghanistan, the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Audronius Ažubalis, said today during a visit to Dushanbe.

"Secure and well-managed borders are key to regional stability," he said. "The OSCE is working with Tajikistan to help strengthen its long border with Afghanistan. I welcome the adoption of the National Border Management Strategy last year, and I look forward its implementation. The OSCE can support in this process, if requested."

He also welcomed support by Tajikistan's government for the OSCE Border Management Staff College, which is located in Dushanbe. The College, established in May 2009, holds seminars and courses for border- customs and other officials from OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation, including Afghanistan.

"This support illustrates the special role Tajikistan plays in the OSCE, particularly when it comes to the Organization's engagement with Afghanistan," Ažubalis said.

Speaking after meetings with President Emomali Rahmon and Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi, Ažubalis said he had come to Tajikistan to express appreciation for the country's work in the OSCE. He also said he offered the Organization's continued support in fields including border management, police reform and work to fight corruption and promote the rule of law - especially reforms of the criminal justice system – as well as freedom of the media, which is one of the priorities of the 2011 Lithuanian OSCE Chairmanship.

"During my meetings, I discussed the crucial role of an independent press in contributing to stability," he said. "I encourage Tajikistan's government to continue working with the independent media to entrench the country's democratic principles. I also hope that lawsuits against newspapers and journalists can be avoided – there is a risk that such cases stifle the media freedom we all treasure."

He also encouraged his counterparts to support a group of young Lithuanians who plan to travel to Tajikistan in June to identify and care for sites where Lithuanian deportees are buried, saying the group's mission "strenghtens the historical memory between our people." The group has organized missions abroad over the past several years.

Ažubalis arrived Monday in Dushanbe for a two-day visit that also includes meetings with Shukurjon Zukhurov, the speaker of the lower house of Parliament, and representatives of political parties and civil society.

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